



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

U.S. Coast Guard in World War I

Historical Chronology

6 April 1917- The United States Declared War on Imperial Germany

- Coast Guard issued a coded dispatch entitled "Plan One: Acknowledge" to every cutter and shore station of the service
- Officers and enlisted men, vessels and units, were transferred to the operational control of the Navy Department.
- The Coast Guard augmented the Navy with its 223 commissioned officers, approximately 4,500 enlisted men, 47 vessels of all types, and 279 stations along the entire United States coastline.

Cutter Convoy Escort and Patrol Duties

- Cutters were assigned to Squadron 2 of Division 6 of the Patrol Forces of the Atlantic Fleet based at Gibraltar.
- Deployed August-September 1917 as part of US naval forces in European waters.
- Six Cutters- *Ossipee*, *Seneca*, *Yamacraw*, *Algonquin*, *Manning*, and *Tampa*
- Escorted vessels between Gibraltar and the British Isles
- Conducted escort and patrol duty in the Mediterranean.
- Other large cutters performed similar duties in home waters, off Bermuda, in the Azores, in the Caribbean, and off the coast of Nova Scotia- operated either under the naval districts or under the direct orders of the Chief of Naval Operations



Tampa ON CONVOY DUTY DURING THE World War

Cutter Actions of Note

- USCGC *Tampa*-CAPT Charles Satterlee, commander.
- 5 September 1918-RADM Albert P. Niblack, USN, Commander of U.S. Naval Forces at Gibraltar, congratulated Satterlee noting *Tampa's* 18 convoy escorts between Gibraltar and Britain as "evidence of a high state of efficiency and excellent ship's spirit..."
- On 26 September 1918 *Tampa*, having completed its duty as ocean escort for a convoy from Gibraltar to Britain, proceeded toward Milford Haven, Wales when it was torpedoed by UB-91. All one hundred-fifteen crewmen, including four Navy crewmen, and all 16 British passengers aboard, were killed. This was the largest loss of life by a US naval unit incurred from enemy action during the war.



- USCGC *Seneca*-16 September 1918
- *Seneca* was escorting 21 vessels to Gibraltar (26th convoy) when the British steamer *Wellington* was torpedoed. While much of the *Wellington's* crew abandoned ship, 1st LT Fletcher W. Brown and 19 volunteers attempted to keep the vessel under way. Despite a heroic effort, *Wellington* foundered in an ensuing storm and 11 of the volunteers were lost.
- Medals Awarded- 1 Distinguished Service Medal, 19 Navy Crosses, 1 volunteer was also awarded a Gold Lifesaving Medal



Captains of the Port

- April, 1917-Coast Guard personnel assisted in the seizure of interned Axis merchant vessels in many US ports.
- Espionage Act-15 June 1917- USCG charged with protecting merchant shipping from sabotage and empowered the service to safeguard US ports.
- 6 December 1917- Halifax, Nova Scotia- one of the worst maritime tragedies in history. Here an ammunition ship collided with another vessel, caught fire, and exploded. Detonation leveled the harbor and suburb-1,600 dead, 9,000 injured, and more homeless. CGC Morrill witnessed the explosion and steamed to the assistance. With the increase in munitions shipments, particularly in New York, US authorities did not want a similar event in US.
- The "Captain of the Port" (COTP), title first used in New York, was the officer charged with supervising the safe loading of explosives--similar posts was soon established in other U.S. ports.
- CAPT Godfrey L. Carden, was COTP in New York.
- Majority of the nation's munitions shipments passed through New York.

- For a period of 1-1/2 years, more than 1,600 vessels, carrying more than 345-million tons of explosives, sailed from this port. In 1918 Carden's division (1,400 personnel, 4 Corps of Engineers tugs, and 5 harbor cutters) was the largest single command in the Coast Guard.

Other Accomplishments of Note

- 16 August 1918- crew of Chicamacomico (NC) Lifeboat Station conduct rescue through burning oil of 42 crewmen from the torpedoed British tanker SS *Mirlo*.
- 4 October 1918-T.A. Gillespie fire, Morgan, NJ- USCG personnel responded to a fire at the shell-loading plant and by their actions helped prevent a Halifax-like explosion.
- Coast Guard officers held other important commands during World War I: 25 commanded naval warships in the European war zone, 5 commanded warships attached to the American Patrol detachment in the Caribbean Sea, 23 commanded warships attached to naval districts, and 5 commanded large training camps. Six were assigned to aviation duty, 2 of which commanded important air stations including 1 in France.
- Shortly after the Armistice, 4 Coast Guard officers were assigned to command large naval transports engaged in bringing the troops home from France.
- Officers not assigned to command served in practically every phase of naval activity-on transports, cruisers, cutters, patrol vessels, in naval districts, as inspectors, and at training camps.
- Of the 223 commissioned officers of the Coast Guard, seven met their deaths as a result of enemy action.

Awards and Commendations

- Distinguished Service Medal- (2)
- Navy Cross- (48)
- Gold Lifesaving Medals (8)
- Letter of Commendation (9)



Unknown *Tampa* Crewman, Lamphey Churchyard, Wales, United Kingdom, ca. 2014.

Updated: 01 February 2017